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ABSTRACT

The freshman year in college is perhaps the most important year for many reasons. It is during the freshman year that students form their attitudes toward college and their studies. In addition, many students make decisions as to their college major, their potential occupational field, or whether or not to remain in college at all. In spite of the importance of the freshman year, the year fails at least as often as it may be said to succeed. This lack of success is due in part to the lack of response of the typical freshman curriculum to student needs. The entering freshman in a college often gets the largest classes, the least experienced and poorest paid faculty, the fewest academic options, the least advisement, the dullest subject matter, the least personal living arrangements, and the most personal rules. The freshman curriculum needs to be revised to enable students to match courses with their interests and needs, rather than taking courses because they contain knowledge that everybody should have. If the freshman curricula were to be corrected now, it is possible that much of the talent that is currently dropping out of college may be utilized by our society in 4 years. (HS)

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"JUSTICE FOR FRESHMEN"

by

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A. Things We Know About and Can Agree Upon With Respect to the Freshman Experience.

1. That the Year Is a Critical One. Among the four collegiate years, the first is critical in several respects.

a. This is the year in which a college annually receives a great gift of precious educational capital--capital in the form of freshman expectation that college will be different from high school, that college will be exciting, challenging, and personnally rewarding, that it will engage best energies and possibly transform him as a person. The first weeks in school present the college with a frequent situation of real openness in students, of receptivity to the best the college can offer. But there's one catch to this fund of capital: the college must use it immediately, in that first year, or, all too frequently, it will be gone forever.

b. The freshman year is a time when many critical attitudes are going to be set, especially attitudes toward self in relation to studies. Will the first-year student see the excitement, the power, the meaningfulness, the personal reward that each of us has come to see in higher learning? Or, will he or she see in what we offer little more than a series of exercises or hurdles to be accommodated in the attainment of some more instrumental goal? Or, almost as likely today, will the freshman experience lead the student to reject outright anything further to do with the higher learning?

c. The freshman year is a time when many important decisions are going to be made by students. The decision may be one of a major and/or potential occupational field; of life style, living arrangement, of extra-curricular involvement; or, indeed, of whether or not to remain in college. Obviously, these decisions are important to the student as well as to the college. Will they be well made? Will they be based on the best we had to offer?

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d. The first year of college, given present curricular arrangements, is to a degree designed to develop skills, to allow for testing and exploration, and to remedy and broaden backgrounds. For those students who need these things, the freshman year is the one time where at least a modicum of attention will be paid to basic educational development. How well student and college succeed in the year, then, has much to do with what will be educationally possible in the succeeding three.

e. Finally, in an era of open-door admissions and near-universal higher education, the year is critical to the hopes and personal futures of hundreds of thousands of new entrants. If you are going to link higher education so closely to opportunity for all kinds of employment, and if you are going to paint a democratic aspect on the arrangement by giving every person at least an opportunity to enter higher education, then it is critical that that opportunity be a real one, that the sifting and sorting process envisioned in all this at least be a just one. If, to use Jefferson's image, you are going to rake the rubble to find the gems, you'd better

be very sure the raking process does indeed find and nurture the talent that is there.

The point I'm making now is that the freshman year in college is increasingly a major point at which talent is presumably sorted. The year is important, then, because a lot of things do or don't happen in it which very much affect the lives of people.

2. That the Year Often Fails. A second main point we can acknowledge is that, measured against the high expectations of students, or against the important tasks set for the year by curricular planners, or against the ideal of opportunity that is truly equal, the year fails at least as often as it may be said to succeed, perhaps more often.

We know, from a host of studies, that the high expectations of incoming students for a college experience which is different, challenging, and personnaly rewarding--the "freshman dream," we cynically label it--that these expectations cannot usually survive more than a few weeks experience with the typical freshman regimen. We know, too, that the attitudes toward learning which come to be set in the freshman year too often are limited ones, if not negative. Decisions come to be made, during the year, but all too often in informational and experiential vacuums. Important learnings remain unlearned. The faculty accuses students of being passive and apathetic toward studies. Many indeed are. In many schools, half won't be back next year for more.

Much could be said about each of the above factors, but let me dwell on but one: the drop-out statistics. With all the emphasis on access to higher education in the period since the War, we now find more than half of the age group entering college (and, in many states, 70 to 80% of all high school graduates). This fall, that's nearly 1.9 million new entrants. Yet, more than half of these entrants will drop out within the next year or two; only a third will ever complete a four-year course of study. In many open-door institutions, three-fourths of the entering freshmen will never see the start of a sophomore year. In Illinois community colleges, a combined enrollment of 130,000 students--80% of whom are in transfer curricula--produced only 2,800 A.S. or A.A. degree recipients who actually transferred to continue their education.

All of these statistics are very slippery, of course. But what are they saying to us? Especially when studies of drop-outs show a majority leave because of "dissatisfaction with college" or a desire "to reconsider personal goals and interests"...and when academic failure is only the fifth most frequent reason for leaving among men, and eighth among women. Do they not say that college has failed to engage the attention, much less enthusiasm, of a large part of the age group? Do we define "equal educational opportunity" as meaning only the chance to enter a college door? Need we not think too of the quality, the appropriateness, the effectiveness of the experience inside? And what of the studies which show that those who leave are, as a group, roughly as able as those who remain? How effective is our present freshman year as a "screening device" if fully half the talent is not found and nurtured?

3. That Much of the "Surround" about the Year Has Changed But Not the Year Itself. A striking circumstance is that, looking back 25 years, many things impinging on the year have changed but that model collegiate freshman program has changed comparatively little. As to the second part of this proposition, of course colleges have changed some, but not in essential aspects. Dressel and De Lisle's "Underground Curriculum Trends" is a depressing account of how little things have changed since the 50's. To be sure, there is advanced placement, audio-visual aids,

occasional use of pass-fail gradir but the larger pattern of courses, credits, grades, requirements, and prerequisites remains pretty much the same. I'm sure my freshman schedule of 14 years ago--English Comp, chemistry, algebra, Western Civ, German and phys ed--is still being duplicated this fall by thousands of students.

Yet, how much has changed since then. The number of freshmen in American colleges has increased by 150%, the heterogeneity of backgrounds, abilities, interests even more so. The high school preparation of many of the new entrants is so vastly better, and at the same time so greatly more varied, as to undercut the lower-division curricular assumption that remediation and broadening, accomplished through the mechanism of a common core, would be best for all. The attitude of many new entrants is more skeptical of the value and worth of higher education, making it even more perilous for colleges to risk putting so little before them. The connection between getting an education and getting a job has suddenly become less clear, undercutting <u>that</u> prop we have so long used to at least keep their attention. The continuing proliferation of knowledge and developments in learning theory have served to undercut the basis on which we categorize and dispense knowledge in the freshman year, and many of our freshmen know it. Many things indeed--we could mention student attitudes toward experience, the non-rational, and use of one's life--have changed in the social, cultural and economic "surround" within which the year unfolds; but the year itself has changed but little.

4. <u>That the Obstacles to Change in First-Year Program Are Substantial</u>. Bringing change to first-year programs is no easy matter, as many institutions have found.

A first difficulty is that there is at present no overwhelming demand for change in the year. Educational reform is off the agenda of whatever is left of the student movement; many of the brightest students have come to expect little of higher education and are inclined to write off its reform as a waste of time. A larger group of students treads through or leaves with little thought to the matters we discuss today. The professoriat is divided on many matters and concerned about its economic security. Money, enrollment, and a tapering off of public support frequently preoccupy administrators and trustees.

A second difficulty, more long-term in nature, is the interlocking web of relationships holding freshman program in a state of virtual paralysis. Whatever change one mentions, it seems, calls for several larger changes. Grading practices persist, for example, some say for administrative bookkeeping reasons, but also because employers, graduate schools, and eventually, too, anxious students demand them. Course and credit-distribution requirements might be abolished, but with them will go the delicate balance within the university in which elections are spread predictably over the departments, giving all an equal crack at recruiting majors and a set number of graduate assistant jobs. New approaches to teaching or a shift to an emphasis on advisement call for a range of faculty abilities and interests which often isn't there. One cannot devote greater economic resource to the education of freshmen without having an effect--usually in the form of less money--on some other level of the university. And so it seems to go.

Yet, some institutions <u>do</u> change, and it remains the rule that <u>where</u> the will and impulse for change can be generated, <u>there</u> the obstacles to change can be overcome.

5. <u>That the Resources of Knowledge and Experience Are There for Those Who Would Seek Change in First-Year Program</u>. On the more positive side, very considerable resources are available now to assist colleges in re-thinking what they do for

freshmen, resources in the form of research, theory, commission reports and other written materials, and in the form of experience in colleges with new freshman program. Parenthetically, the import of most of this recent accumulation of knowledge and experience is to render even more anachronistic the continuance of so many of our practices from the past.

First among these resources is research. Research on students is a relatively recent phenomenon--perhaps 90% of the bibliographic entries in Feldman and Newcomb's recent research summary would date from the past dozen years. We can now talk more explicitly about student needs and expectations, the impact of in-class and out-of-class elements on student development, on attitudinal and other changes occurring over the four years, and a host of other matters. In a negative sense, we can point to the fact that several current practices are revealed as not producing the effects claimed for them: requirement systems are a good example of this. Moreover, this research is much more available than it was even a half-dozen years ago--higher education publishing has become a major industry, the ERIC system has become operative, and a whole variety of research summaries and publications have become available, some of the best of them from AAHE.

A happy outcome of this research is the commercial availability now of several research instruments for use on our own campuses--College and University Environment Scales, Institutional Functioning Inventory, College Student Questionnaire, Institutional Self-Study Service, and the like. It is possible through these forms, for example, for a college to know much more about the educational and social background, motivations and interests, and collegiate purposes of its incoming freshmen.

Second, the emergence from psychology of "developmental theory" as a way of looking at the collegiate experience has opened whole new possibilities for understanding what goes on in college and for designing more responsive program. The landmark here is Nevitt Sanford's "The American College," published in 1962, but followed by a host of subsequent research and publications. One needn't buy developmental theory in all its aspects to realize what a significant contribution it has made to our ability to conceptualize the collegiate experience in more realistic terms. A decade or two back, people still debated curriculum in terms of a concept of man's nature or of a theory of knowledge or on the basis of economic, organizational, or manpower models. None of these bases is necessarily valid any longer; what I'm saying here is that we have now an additional very powerful way of looking at the relationship of college and student. One need look only at Joseph Katz's "No Time for Youth" to see how fruitful the developmental approach can be.

Third, for those who like the implications thought out for them, there are a number of remarkable commission documents which lay out well the need for change in the freshman year and practical ways in which it can be done. I especially have in mind the recommendations of the Hazen Committee on the Student in Higher Education, the Newman Task Force Report, the Assembly on University Goals and Governance, and, of course, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. In another category are several reports issuing from individual institutions, such as Brown, Rutgers, M.I.T., Stanford, Berkeley, and Oberlin. There are many fine books on change and its accomplishment; Dwight Ladd's "Change in Educational Policy" and Harold Taylor's two recent books come to mind as especially valuable.

Finally, there is the asset to the reformer of institutional experience. Almost all of the changes one might hear of today are in existence at one or more colleges around the country. In moving from college-established to student-initiated programs of study, for example, or in adopting a new pattern of mini-course exploratory

study, or a contract-system of academic work and evaluation, it is helpful to know that others have tried each of these things and that there is an experience to be drawn upon (and this is much more the case than was true a half-dozen years ago). That experience, of course, is often much harder to draw upon than may be the research literature--but that's the very reason we've established this series of "information-sharing" conferences.

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Let me turn now to some more personal observations on some of the things which may be required in the rejuvenation of the freshman year.

The first of these I call a New Attitude Toward Freshmen and Their Experience. I have in mind the psychological hold-over from our elitist origins which tends to regard the entering student as a neophyte in the organization, a tyro, a recruit, as someone who has already been favored by being admitted but who must now undergo initiation rituals in which he must prove himself worthy of the better things the institution has to offer. Just as in other elitist organizations, where the professional football rookie must wait tables, the fraternity pledge mop floors, the Marine recruit do push-ups on demand, so the entering freshman in a college often gets the largest classes, the least experienced and poorest paid faculty, the fewest academic options, the least advisement, the dullest subject matter, the least personal living arrangements and most personal rules. Per-unit expenditure for freshmen will be half that for seniors. It has all the elements of an initiation, or perhaps an apprenticeship, with the survivors presumed to be the elect. But what a price we pay for this approach, in terms of lost talent and the confirmation of negative attitudes!

The first step toward Justice for Freshmen is a new attitude toward freshmen, an attitude which sees in each entrant a unique individual worthy of the best the institution has. The assumption must be that each has a potential to be discovered, that each will succeed, and that whatever "proving" needs to be done rests equally between the college and the student. The unjust imbalance in the allocation of educational resource among the classes must be redressed; each freshman is as important as each senior. The "prove yourself" attitude is inconsistent with the democratic ideals of equal access and educational opportunity.

A second requisite of freshman program renewal will be New, Holistic Ways of Looking at and Responding to Entering Students. We surely know, for example, that the experience of individuals in organizations is holistic and entire, that for freshmen in colleges the critical events in learning and growth may occur equally in or out of the classroom. An ideal freshman experience would provide consistent atmospheres and experiences which would reinforce one another in the direction of learning and growth.

Organizationally, however, how do we look at the situation of freshmen? Who is responsible? The curriculum committee? The dormitory head resident? Freshman instructors? The dean of the faculty? The freshman football coach? The counseling staff? All are, of course. What I'm saying is that freshmen as a class have identifiably distinct tasks and problems and that colleges need to devise organizational mechanisms for dealing with them. In many colleges, in effect you have a problem of ineffectiveness but no effective way of dealing with it. I personnally am impressed with the handful of institutions which have appointed Directors of Freshman Studies, people with feet in the academic area, perhaps reporting to a faculty-student committee of a Senate, but with overall responsibility for the coordination of orientation, advisement, pattern of coursework, working with teachers of freshmen, counseling, residence-hall programs, program evaluation, and the like.

A third helpful mechanism for change--and it really follows from my first two recommendations--is the Establishment of a Separate Set of Objectives for the Year. This coincides with my recommendation of thinking separately about freshmen as a class of students and would provide a set of goals or guidelines for a new director of freshman studies.

Everybody agrees that setting educational objectives is important to do, but also knows how fatuous the assignment can be, especially when you're trying to do so for the entirety of a collegiate experience. The length of time is so extended (four years), the activities so diverse, that concise statements which translate into concrete program guides are exceedingly difficult to frame. But need the difficulty be so great if we think just about freshmen and what we want for them in their first-year experience? Would it not be possible for a faculty to say, come what may in the freshman year, there are these three things we want to see realized in it:

a. sharpened communication skills, both written and oral;
b. a sense of excitement about and commitment to studies;
c. a realistic notion of their own abilities and the possibilities in college for realizing them.

Other goals are possible, of course. The point is that, depending on the particular expectations and needs of one's own students, it is possible and highly desirable to set objectives for the experience, in effect to sort out just what it is you believe it is most important to accomplish in the year.

A fourth recommendation I would offer is that colleges examine their freshman year in the context of grades 11-14 sequence. It is only common sense any particular year on the educational ladder must be thought about in the context of what comes before and what comes later. Much of the present difficulty with the freshman year is that changes are occurring or should occur in the years surrounding it.

On the high school level, we are seeing increasingly the introduction of subject matters formerly the province of the collegiate lower division. A survey reported last spring in The Chronicle of Higher Education indicates how much overlap or repetition may now exist: high school teachers examining lower-division course outlines thought 30% of the material repeated what had been taught in high school; college teachers examining high school outlines conceded a 23% overlap. Further, the variety of options open to high school students is such that students entering college have increasingly varied academic backgrounds. These two developments alone make it increasingly difficult to justify devoting the two introductory collegiate years to general education, and to attempt a single core of courses which will be apt for all.

The freshman year also must be seen in relation to its next relation, the sophomore year. There obviously is little gain in getting people charged up in their freshman year only to dump them in a bunch of standard survey courses in the second. In my opinion, the whole idea of a lower-division--of two introductory years of general studies designed to remedy and broaden backgrounds--the whole concept really ought to be junked as a failure. In too many cases the remediation and broadening just aren't necessary anymore. General studies probably offer the poorest basis for remedial study anyway. Delaying attention to specialized study until the junior year is a waste of motivation with students who come in knowing they want to be a sociologist, or what not. There is no good evidence that people actually do better in specialized study because of the precedence of general study. For that matter, most of the incoming freshman's 12 prior years of study have been general in character.

Now how you unsort all of these factors is not entirely clear to me. But clearly, new attention needs to be given to an existing sequence of studies in which the freshman element fails to cope with high school developments at one end and is the poor

relation in a bankrupt division at the other.

Let me mention two possible solutions. One is that of Clark Kerr's Carnegie Commission on Higher Education: abolish the lower division, move the repetitious general studies firmly over to the high school side, have one new introductory year devoted to the actual needs of individual students, a year more "challenging and useful," two years in a major, then a degree.

To buy this pattern intact, though, you need to accept the concept of college being a model three-year experience. An alternative might be the so-called "hour-glass" curriculum now in effect at a number of schools: a special-purpose freshman year of skill development and orientation to learning; followed by two in a major; capped by a senior year of integrative and independent study.

Another major alternative is somewhat more radical at this point: a grades 11-14 "intermediate college," recommended by the Four-School Study Report, "16-20: The Liberal Education of an Age Group."

In any case, my point is that each college, in considering the appropriateness of freshman program, do so in the context of a possible need for a new sequence of study experiences.

A final main point I would make for the reconstitution of the freshman year is that the times seem to call for a much greater attention to the situation of individual students. I think it is time to cease thinking in terms of freshman curriculum, for example, in terms of "What knowledge everybody should have" and more in terms of "given this student's background, ability, interests, and purposes for college and beyond, what educationally is the best use which can be made of this year?" Such an approach, I believe, would have several implications. One would be the abolition of lower-division course and credit-distribution requirements (which I believe are intellectually no longer defensible and, in any case, of dubious utility or effectiveness). In place of the college tacking the requirements on the wall and telling everybody to go to it, I would have students themselves propose programs of study based upon a faculty-aided review of backgrounds and purposes. I would have them do this in a context of the college making far more explicit than it now does what it means by a liberal education and what are the possibilities it offers for the realization of such an education. It also means a far greater emphasis upon a continuing orientation to learning and especially upon advisement--dialog between student and faculty on the meaning of what is being undertaken. I would favor student-initiated programs with advisement, even if they come at the expense of curricular neatness of design, just for the possibility that students will know the why of whatever they undertake, and undertake it as their own unique responsibility.

I am not adamantly opposed to requirements. In fact I admire such specially designed required freshman programs as Prof. Tussman's experiment at Berkeley and the Thirteen College Curricular Program of freshman studies mounted by Black colleges through the Institute for Services to Education. In fact, we need as much diversity and options as we can find. What I speak against is the sameness of curricula and freshman program so evident today across all types of institutions, and the rigidity and lack of responsiveness to the situation of students considered one at a time that requirement systems so often embody.

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There are indeed other things in need of remedy before we will go far in the achievement of justice for freshmen--

--the elimination of the often subtle racism and sexism in our programs which serves to stifle the aspiration and achievement of so many freshmen ("freshmen", "fresh women", "fresh people");

--the elimination of pointless transfer requirements which constrain the possibilities for change in lower-division programs and especially in community colleges;

--the necessity for a major re-allocation of funds within the undergraduate program so as to fund adequately the education of entering students;

--the necessity of devising new learning situations, in-class and out, to bring back the sense of wonder, excitement and play that many students last associated with learning when they were in kindergarten;

--the desirability, as the Carnegie Commission has suggested, of making it easier for people to "stop out" of the educational process at those points at which doing so might be healthy;

--and finally, while this may not be within the purview of each institution, I mention the necessity of enhancing and honoring forms of occupational education as a fit form of higher learning for many of the students who are our concern today.

With these remarks in mind, I bid you a "good day" as you continue your search for "Justice for Freshmen."

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